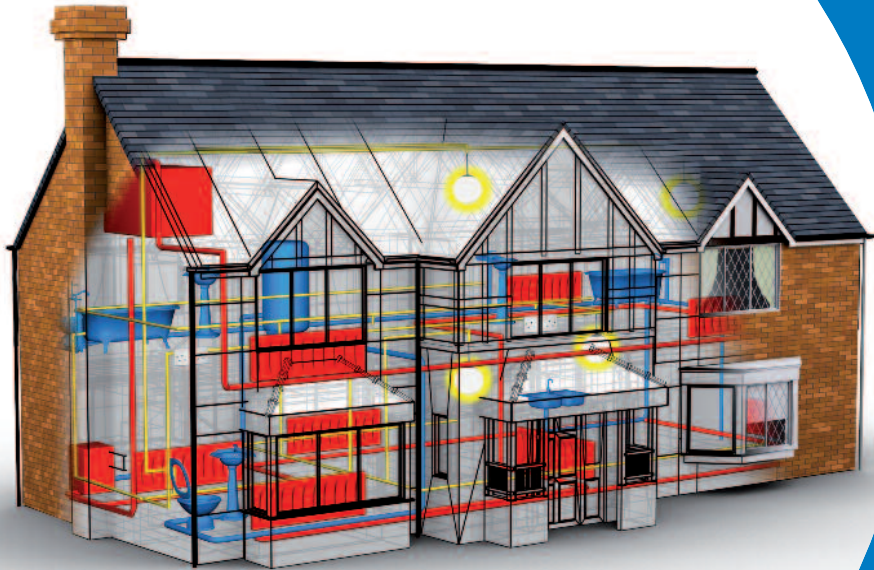




# South West Case Studies



[www.summitskills.org.uk/sw](http://www.summitskills.org.uk/sw)

Training makes good business sense. If your staff don't have the right skills for the job, you're not only unprepared for today's projects, but also vulnerable to future risk as the marketplace becomes more technical and competitive.

As the Sector Skills Council for building services engineering, SummitSkills works across the sector to encourage employers of all sizes and types to invest in training. It's not just about craft skills; at every level of your business – craft, technical, managers, supervisors and directors – it is vital to have staff who are qualified and competent.

But don't just take our word for it – this booklet showcases employers from all walks of the building services engineering sector and also gives a great example of how other related industries use our skills, qualifications and training programmes.

They describe the ways that training really does pay and, for them, how staff development is not just an optional extra, but an essential investment for a sustainable business.

**Chris Havill** 4

*HavMain*

**Sue Tucker** 7

*Fusion Electric*

**Peter Duncan** 8

*Pulse Services*

**Paul Hurt** 11

*P&R Hurt Electrical &  
Mechanical Services*

**Nigel Overthrow** 12

*Convections*

**Paul Cook** 15

*PRP Electrical Ltd*

Over the last two years **HavMain** has invested heavily in staff development as a direct strategy to tackle the effects of recession. With new opportunities already presenting themselves, **Chris Havill** believes that through their investment, the company has built the foundations of a strong and resilient workforce.

The industry is changing all the time, so we wanted to ensure we could respond to the possible risks we could face in a recession. This was the reason we decided to invest in training, to develop a versatile workforce with the key focus on real adaptability.

So far it's been very successful. Because of our evolving skill set we've been invited to tender for projects that a few years ago we wouldn't have dreamed of. As a competent and qualified company we can be listed with procurement bodies such as CHAS and Exor, which has given us access to work that will make a huge difference to our company.

We're a fairly small company with 30 staff in total. There are not many opportunities to promote from within the business so we encourage people to develop themselves as much as possible in order to enhance the company. Ultimately as their skills grow, the company grows too, creating more opportunities all round.

Our training is split into three areas. The first is health and safety, to ensure we not only meet but exceed legislative requirements. By training people to a higher level than they need, they become more productive, tackling tasks in a safe and efficient manner the first time, rather than referring queries back to the office or wasting time delaying a job because of lack of confidence. It also means that when new legislation comes in we're already trained to that standard.

The second area is professional development, providing technical courses that enable people to do their job thoroughly. We support staff to gain professional and Chartered status through bodies such as CIBSE. This is important to us and has also given us a competitive edge as it means we can market ourselves to prestigious clients such as local authorities, large industrial developers or health authorities, who see we are a professional company that can provide the skills and quality needed for their projects.

The third area is skills training such as management training and soft skills to help people look for different ways to do their jobs. This is where Train to Gain has helped us. We wanted to train our top level staff, because if you're led by well trained and well motivated people the rest of the company reflects that. South Devon College were aware of the Train to Gain process and with their assistance we received match funding for three management and leadership courses. We're now looking to develop our managers and leaders further with more in-depth training.

*“Thanks to our investment in training, we have all the skills in place to put us in a strong position for when the economy kicks off the shackles of recession.”*

In the future we'll build on what we've established so far and hope to implement HR tools that larger companies use to develop their staff. We'll be enabling engineers, administrators and managers to take a lead on their professional development with the aim of getting as many as possible accredited to join professional bodies. By doing that, we can bring new ways of thinking into the business and ensure we're fully up to date. If we weren't to join such bodies and set ourselves aside, we would either stagnate or cease to exist. It's an essential part of what we are.

Unfortunately we've witnessed other companies suffering in the current economic climate because they haven't changed their business models or adapted sufficiently. Thanks to our investment in training, we have all the skills in place to put us in a strong position for when the economy kicks off the shackles of recession. Overall it's given us the ability to react quickly and effectively to whatever might present itself to us in the future.





Fusion Electric already had a sound background in technical staff development, but a lack of formal management training led to concerns that with no proper structure, over time, business performance could be affected. With the objectives of developing management systems, measuring business performance and rewarding staff success, the company was able to gain financial support to help put plans in place. **Sue Tucker** explains more.

We have always been aware of a gap in our management and leadership training. Our managing director has a sound business background but over the years it's been self-taught with no formal skills development. When we found out that Train to Gain funding was available for management level, we began to look at how it might help us.

*“If staff are able to make decisions with confidence that they are right in their approach, they ultimately do a better job and we all become more professional.”*

Working with an external training advisor, Shire Business Synergy, we went back to basics and looked at the business as a whole and where we wanted it to go. Through a detailed planning process, we put a business forecast in place that became the official structure for addressing our corporate objectives.

It wasn't just a case of us going on courses; the management training facilitated a whole package of business processes that we are now operating. It's given us the confidence to know for certain what we want and how to move forward. You often run a company without looking at where you want to be in five years. As a result of this future planning we know how many employees we require and how much training we need to provide year-on-year.

For both the staff and the directors, training gives us the foundations on which we can build a successful company. By investing in management and employees, and by having clear business policies in place, it gives everyone structure. If staff are able to make decisions with confidence that they are right in their approach, they ultimately do a better job and we all become more professional.

The funding we secured towards this business development was a great support. We were introduced to Train to Gain through Business Link and our training provider P&R Hurt. Consultation with Business Link answered our questions about how the process would work, so we contacted Train to Gain and it all went smoothly from there. We were even able to suggest a training provider who could help us, rather than being obliged to work with a pre-determined supplier.

P&R Hunt also introduced us to SummitSkills, and we're now contributing to the assessment of future skills through the South West Sector Skills Agreement implementation group. It's important to us to help in this way, as we feel very strongly in having electricians that are fully competent and qualified. If we take part in the regional skills planning process it helps SummitSkills to achieve that for the whole industry.

We stand by our training ethos and we will continue to invest in our business and our employees wherever possible. In the future we aim to become more involved in renewables, both in design and installation. With the management training under our belts we can be confident that we are managing our resources effectively and progressing our business with all the elements in place.

With ten engineers in the South West and a further ten in the South East, **Pulse Services** pride themselves on the quality of their workmanship and customer service. This wouldn't be possible without a highly skilled workforce, explains contracts manager **Peter Duncan**...

Training is essential for us. Without it we wouldn't have the client base we have; indeed on certain sites we wouldn't even be considered for the work if we didn't meet a certain criteria. This means training is commercially important to us. But it's also about having high quality engineers, maintaining excellence and retaining our position in the marketplace. As well as a business incentive, training help us help our team to maintain a high standard.

We train our engineers to NVQ levels 2 and 3, as well as apprentice training, with one currently studying refrigeration and air conditioning. In the office we have technical staff trained to HNC level and we're currently looking at Business Link support for further management training.

Having trained staff in place has given us the confidence that, when we tender for work, we can face customers with the knowledge that we're backed up by a sound skills base to follow it through. We have a good, solid client base and many satisfied customers who proactively recommend us. Quite often I've been told by a client that we're not the cheapest but they like our work and the service we provide. Without the right skills in place this wouldn't be possible.

Our continuity of clients is also testament to our workforce. Homebase have been a client of ours for 22 years, and for the last five years Bath Spa University has renewed its contract with us year on year, which is an excellent indication of the quality of our staff and their work.

We're now getting actively involved in renewable technologies. Our engineers are skilled with the core competences in plumbing and electrical qualifications, but up-skilling in new technologies will soon be part of the training schedule so we're prepared for the future.

As well as training in-house, we're committed to developing the wider industry. I sit on SummitSkills' Sector Skills Agreement implementation group as it's important to us to ensure standards are being maintained across the whole sector, as it ultimately affects our business. It's a really good forum; you meet companies from all different disciplines and it's great to learn from others and share your own information.

I've also signed up to be a schools ambassador, to encourage young people to consider building services engineering as a career choice. Our sector needs to open students' eyes to the career opportunities we can offer and I see it as an opportunity to get involved and play my part.

*“Having trained staff in place has given us the confidence that, when we tender for work, we can face customers with the knowledge that we're backed up by a sound skills base to follow it through.”*

We want to encourage further business development with our office staff; we have a committed administration team and we'd like to train and empower them to spot new business opportunities. We're currently speaking to Business Link about working with a consultant who can help us with this.

We will continue to maintain our skills and maximise the potential of anyone who would like to develop further. Our recent award-winning apprentice is now keen to undertake an electrical design course; I see this as an investment for our business. If staff show real potential for the future you have to support them and you will reap the benefits.





Operating in a number of niche markets means that **P&R Hurt Electrical & Mechanical Services** needs home-grown staff with specialist skills. **Paul Hurt** describes how his training ethos has led to a successful business and a happy workforce...

We currently have a workforce of 11, with two apprentices in training, and I'm proud to say that all my engineers started as apprentices and I trained them myself.

Our ethos is to train to produce good commercial quality. We don't just go through the motions to claim funding; we train to deliver a high standard of work that fundamentally improves the business. We train to provide broad underpinning knowledge so staff fully understand what they do and why they're doing it. We do not train apprentices to lose them, so I strive to ensure they continually are engaged, motivated and fully-skilled.

A large part of our business is hazardous materials work, such as pyrotechnics, aircraft refuelling and filling stations, so there's a high level of specialism and technicality. I couldn't take an electrician and put them to work straight away as they wouldn't have the specialist knowledge or skills we require, so apprentice training for me is the best way to provide my workforce with the exact skills they need for our clients.

Our base standard is NVQ Level 3, but everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential and we'll allow anyone to study and develop beyond the fundamentals of being an electrician. Two of our team are qualified lecturers and assessors, so in between lessons they are on the tools, which ensures their teaching is 100% relevant based on knowledge from out in the field.

As well as technical training we also provide opportunities in management development and other skills that are needed to help our team learn how to run a business. We're currently working closely with the Electrical Contractors' Association on their scheme to help companies with succession planning, which is particularly pertinent to us as I move closer to retirement.

It's important to me to volunteer some time to SummitSkills as chair of the regional implementation group. Taking part is the only way to ensure you can influence how future training, skills and standards are developed. As employers, we need to be involved to ensure the qualifications are right and are what the industry really needs.

*“We train to provide broad underpinning knowledge, so staff understand what they do and why they're doing it.”*

Our training has had a hugely positive impact on client perception of our company. The people that know or have an appreciation of our specialisms come to us, even though we're not the cheapest, because they know they are getting a highly qualified team. Clients are very aware these days of what they are paying for, and do not want to pay skilled rates for semi-skilled operatives. With us, they know they receive fully-skilled electricians.

On the staff side, I think the team are very aware they have a broader range of opportunities than they might have elsewhere. We deliberately move people around various jobs to give them opportunity to learn something new. It may not be the best business decision to take someone off a job to place them elsewhere, but if there's a chance it will benefit their overall understanding and help them acquire extra skills, we'll do it. It's all part of creating a skilled, content and productive workforce.

When **Nigel Overthrow** first needed to expand his business, **Convections**, his first priority was to develop in-house skills to his high standards. The best way he felt he could do this was to recruit an apprentice and since then, he's never looked back...

At present, from our three employees, two are apprentices who are just finishing their training. Due to the nature of our business, we have to constantly retrain to keep our skills as current as possible. So in addition to apprenticeship training we make sure we're fully up to date in areas such as water regulations and unvented systems. We also take advantage of manufacturer and technical training, because if a new product comes out I want to ensure everyone has a good knowledge, allowing us to pass the full benefits of that product back to the client.

For us, recruiting apprentices does not just bring cost benefits, it provides a blank canvas from which you can create an employee who is trained in your way of working. This is not just in areas such as practical technical skills, but also when it comes to developing good people skills and customer relationships. It's the best way I've found to produce competent, highly skilled operatives who are also highly motivated.

With the complexity of work that's in our industry, we need intelligent people. If your workforce is not educated it will not be able to do the job properly. Through our training we have a fully skilled workforce who not only are up to date with changes in the industry, but have the confidence to carry out their work to the standard required in today's world.

I'm positive that my business wouldn't be as successful if we hadn't trained the way we do. It's definitely given us the competitive edge – my team knows what a good standard of workmanship is, and we don't have call backs or installation problems. The only time we go back to a customer is if they'd like another service from us. I've also seen the workmanship of some of my competitors and it sometimes leaves a lot to be desired. You can certainly tell the quality of work between those who train and those who don't.

Working with partners is also important to help us achieve our aims. We use JTL for our apprentice training and the benefits of working with them are immense. They take the pressure off the whole apprenticeship process and they're very thorough in what they do.

*“Training and developing apprentices into fully qualified members of staff will give small companies a far better workforce.”*

On the skills planning side, we benefit from a partnership with SummitSkills. I'm happy to give up time to contribute to meetings, I not only find them useful but I also strongly believe we have got to put something back into the industry. It's not all about taking; none of us are in this business for ever and if you want to ensure there are skilled genuine, honest, competent, people left to take the industry forward, we have to put something back in.

Training and developing apprentices into fully qualified members of staff can help small companies to reinforce the quality of their workforce. It's sometimes easy to use subcontractors if workloads are high, but that's just a quick fix. If the job they do is not up to your standard, your reputation is at risk. With apprentices, the payback is a fully skilled operative who is trained to meet your business needs – within a year they are working completely on their own and are productive. We've benefitted from this approach so far and will continue to do so in the future.





Being given the chance to shine as a teenage apprentice was all **Paul Cook**, Managing Director of **PRP Electrical Ltd**, needed to go on and prove his abilities as an electrical engineer. When the time came for him to train staff for his own business, he considered it his responsibility to pass that opportunity on to others. Today PRP Electrical prides itself on training not just a team of electricians, but a team of accomplished problem solvers – one of which has gone on to win two industry apprenticeship awards.

Many years ago I left school with few qualifications. I was lucky enough to be given an opportunity to get into the electrical industry by companies who recognised it wasn't about how good someone is when they come out of a classroom, it's about how well they can do a job and adapt to the situations thrown at them on site. Being academically brilliant in the classroom is great, but it's a major issue if you don't have the practical skills out in the field to work through problems. I still hold this view and consider everyone who comes to work here the same way.

*“I think taking on young apprentices gives something back to the industry that gave me my opportunity, and helps mould our raw talent into the being the best engineers they can possibly be.”*

It's an approach that has stood the company in good stead and we've trained some exceptionally talented apprentices. My first apprentice won the Sparks UK Apprentice of the Year 2010 award and went on to get third place in the UK SkillELECTRIC competition in 2010 against some of the best industry apprentices.

Our training ethos is quite simple. We don't just train people to be an electrician, we train them to be problem solvers first and then good electricians. We teach them good working practices, the best way of tackling a project and to learn how to work out the problems inherent in every job. They are given small tasks to do at the beginning of their training, which get progressively harder as they go on as the months and years pass.

We don't interfere while they're doing a task or jump in with corrections, but check their work afterwards and whether they are happy with what they've done. If they're not happy with it or if there's something not right, we ask them to do it again. This way they learn by doing and not just by absorbing information while standing and watching a qualified engineer.

I have one rule with apprentices – if they are willing to learn we will do our utmost to teach them, if they don't we advise them they should think about another direction. If an apprentice wants to learn, if they passionately want to be successful at their chosen trade, we want them working for us. We've had our training programme running for five years now and can tell within two or three days if someone have the belief in them and will make it long-term. If they can't concentrate and focus for an hour now they won't get through in two or three years when they have more responsibilities. Some people have come in thinking only about making big money in the electrical trade and they rarely succeed.

Apprenticeships are a great way to train new staff. It gives them a good grounding in a base trade and young people with the right attitude and a desire to succeed can be trained in the carrying out projects the correct way. I think taking on young apprentices gives something back to the industry that gave me my first opportunity, and helps develop our raw talent into becoming the best engineers they can possibly be.

I have a dedicated team of professional electricians and trainees that go that extra yard to fulfil our client's requirements and needs to the best of their ability.

**SummitSkills**

Vega House  
Opal Drive  
Fox Milne  
Milton Keynes  
MK15 0DF

T: 01908 303960

F: 01908 303989

[www.summitskills.org.uk](http://www.summitskills.org.uk)

[email.enquiries@summitskills.org.uk](mailto:email.enquiries@summitskills.org.uk)